

STATION SPOTLIGHT

Concern for Neighbor's Food Bank

by Felicia Hallenbeck

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. ~ George Bernard Shaw

How do you show concern for your neighbors? Let me tell you what happens when an entire community comes together to show concern for theirs.

I recently had the privilege of visiting Concern For Neighbors Food Bank in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, where I received a warm welcome and was given a tour of the facility by the Executive Director, Anne Peterson. It was inspiring to observe the level of effort and commitment it takes to run this operation smoothly and efficiently, as well as the level of community involvement.



It all started about 43 years ago in the basement of a private home. Through the collective efforts of several South Snohomish County churches and five volunteers, "Concern For Neighbors Food Bank" opened its basement (doors) in 1971 with a very simple mission "To reach out to hungry neighbors with supplemental and nutritious food items." The organization served approximately 18 clients at that time.

Today, Concern For Neighbors Food Bank brings together an entire community of people who are willing to help an entire community of people in need. Weekly contributions of food come from Fred Meyer, QFC, and Albertsons through the innovative [Grocery Rescue Program](#) started in 2002. Weekly contributions also come from [Food Lifeline](#), [Northwest Harvest](#), and the Snohomish County Food Coalition; organizations who share the common goal of ending hunger in the state of Washington by locating resources such as overstocked food items and seasonal items that are no longer salable. Further and supplemental contributions come from non-Grocery Rescue markets and bakeries in the local area.



The community also comes together through food drives held by local schools, social organizations, churches, and businesses. In December of 2013 alone, Mountlake Terrace High School brought in a whopping 12,000 lbs of food; a strong testament to what the youth of the community can do.

Further cash contributions come from the Hubbard Family Foundation and Hazel Miller Foundation. These much needed donations help to defray the cost of operating the food bank, and are used to purchase items such as food-grade gloves, plastic bags, and additional dairy or other food items that are in short supply.

On a smaller, but still much needed scale, individuals within the community continue to bring their contributions of canned and dried goods, as well as cash donations, in an effort to help their neighbors.

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All financial support from the community is applied towards fiscal needs such as rent, utilities, insurance, fuel and other non-food items.

The organization relies solely on the volunteer efforts of approximately 60 individuals, Anne included, who willingly serve their neighbors with their time, labor, skills, and innovative ideas. On the day I visited, trucks were arriving with produce and bakery items picked up from area grocery stores and Krispy Kreme. They were swiftly unloaded and everything was weighed for documentation purposes. The produce was then placed on folding tables where other volunteers, wearing food-grade gloves, sorted and inspected the fruits and vegetables. Produce that was badly bruised or over-ripe was transferred to a bin for composting - a program started and maintained by yet another volunteer.

As I toured the warehouse, trailers and cold storage areas, trucks continued to arrive with contributions from Northwest Harvest and the like. I was amazed by how organized the facility was kept. Canned and dry goods are kept in storage trailers and moved up into distribution shelving based upon their sell-by dates. Moving to the back of the warehouse, where clients will eventually pick-up their food items, I saw rows of bags being assembled for distribution. Shelves were well-organized and immaculate, and all of the volunteers I met were warm and welcoming. In fact, the camaraderie between the volunteers was palpable.



Volunteer drivers routinely pick up produce, meat/poultry, dairy, bakery, and sometimes seasonal items four days per week. Other volunteers work on either Mondays, when produce and other food items are sorted, canned and dried goods are moved up to those distribution shelves, bags are assembled, and the facility is cleaned in preparation for Tuesdays; and/or Tuesdays, when clients arrive to pick up their grocery items.

These volunteers begin arriving at 7:00 a.m. both Monday and Tuesday, and stay until the last bit of work is done. In addition to volunteering these two days a week, many of the volunteers participate in food drives through local festivals, parades, and organized social events; such as National Night Out - an annual effort to heighten awareness and enhance community relations.



On the Monday I arrived, I was told that they were anticipating approximately 150 to 170 clients/families from the Brier, South Lynnwood, and Mountlake Terrace areas. I was advised that this number is actually down from the 180 to 200 clients/families being served at this same time period last year, but that the number of families served will most likely increase due to the recent passage of the Farm Bill. This bill includes \$8.6 billion in cuts over 10 years to the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (better known as SNAP or more commonly referred to as food stamps).

If my article has painted a pretty picture for you of a cohesive group of volunteers and a community that has come together to take care of their neighbors, it is. That does not mean, however, that they do not need your help. If you have any time, skills, abilities, innovative ideas, and/or desire to help others; you are needed. This organization is run by volunteers like you, and I can tell you that this is one fun place to be where you will be welcomed and where you will want to stay. This particular group of volunteers exemplifies community.

If you are interested in joining these wonderful individuals, please contact John McAlpine at (425) 374-6374 or email him johnm@ccswv.org for more information.

To learn more about Concern For Neighbors Food Bank, please visit their website at <http://concern4neighborsfb.org>.

You can also follow the links in the article above to learn more about the Grocery Rescue Program, Food Lifeline, and Northwest Harvest.